

VZCZCXRO1244
RR RUEH DU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMR
DE RUEH KI #0527/01 0940658
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 040658Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3565
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHRO/USMISSION UN ROME

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000527

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: Office of Transition Initiatives' Wendy Henning
DRC visit March 12 - 27, 2006

¶1. Summary: USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) Program Manager, Wendy Henning visited the DRC from March 12 - March 27, 2006. The purpose of this visit was to assist with closeout activities and the smooth handover of CTO and other management responsibilities to the Mission. Ms. Henning joined OTI Country Representative Stacia George and USAID/DRC General Development Officer Jeff Bryan on a visit to Bukavu and Bunia to observe project implementation; to meet with implementing partner staff; and to discuss next-steps for projects the Independent Electoral Committee (CEI), and CONADER, the national institution in charge of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) are planning. She also spent time in the Mission assisting with final closeout of the OTI/DRC office. End Summary.

¶2. Bukavu Visit March 13 - 15: In Bukavu the team observed the work of the International Rescue Committee, Chemonics International's sub-contractor for the South Kivu Community Reintegration project. IRC is running the "Synergy D'Education Communautaire et Appui a la Transition" (SECA) program in two war-affected areas outside of Bukavu, Kabare and Walungu. The team visited three community rehabilitation project sites and five Youth Education and Skills training sites. Overall, the project is progressing well though there is reason for concern that some rehabilitation efforts may be behind schedule for the planned June 1 completion.

¶3. The team also held meetings with the Bukavu branches of the IEC and CONADER. The discussions with the IEC focused on their preparations for national elections in June and identifying gaps that USAID might address through the Rapid Response mechanism. IEC's main challenge is information dissemination, in particular messages related to how to vote and acceptance of election results. Use of Rapid Response grants to address last minute needs for information dissemination was very effective in the lead-up to the December 2005 Constitutional referendum. With more advance planning, the grants could have a similarly positive impact on the June 2006 national elections.

¶4. Discussions with CONADER focused on the status of the demobilization program, in particular access to ex-combatant identification cards and other anticipated services. The South Kivu SECA program has encountered a large number of "spontaneously demobilized" ex-combatants who have not been through any official processes. CONADER explained that its reintegration system --sensitization efforts, mobile disarmament teams, Orientation Centers,

and follow-on programs -- cannot keep up with current demands but that it is in the process of engaging more NGO and IO partners to assist with the effort. CONADER expects to have demobilized 10,000 ex-combatants in South Kivu province by the end of June and is aiming for 15,000 by the end of the year.

15. Bunia Visit March 15-18: The main purpose of the Bunia visit was the final OTI National Team meeting with staff from IRC Bukavu; Chemonics International, Bunia and Kinshasa teams; OTI; and the USAID Mission. There were some 40 participants including Project Development Officers (PDOs), Master Trainers (MTs), administrative support and management. During the two-day gathering, staff reviewed project progress, identified lessons learned, and discussed next steps. Overall, meeting participants were satisfied with the project's impact to date, highlighting strong project design, staff commitment, and flexibility as main reasons for success. There was extensive discussion of the OTI focus on targeted assistance to the transition versus a longer-term development approach.

16. CONADER Bunia staff paid a visit to the meeting. This was a unique opportunity for the project staff, in particular the Master Trainers and Project Development Officers, to speak directly with CONADER and to voice their concerns. In particular, the staff raised the issues of CONADER and its partners delivering consistent messages to ex-combatants and the need for CONADER support in reaffirming these in the field. Unfortunately, CONADER made a number of promises of information and meetings that, to date, have proven empty.

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17. Kinshasa - Closeout: While in Kinshasa, Henning assisted with a number of tasks related to OTI closeout and handover of the project to the DRC Mission. Henning handed over and reviewed copies of OTI-Washington CTO files. She also drafted the OTI closeout cable, portions of the OTI quarterly report, and the Activity Implementation Report on the current SECA program in Ituri and South Kivu for an upcoming Mission review. Lastly, Henning clarified details of post-handover procedures to share with the Chemonics International Washington team upon return to the US.
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